



Free Money? There's No Such Thing

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MADISON – Free money sounds great. But if someone calls out of the blue telling you that you have been awarded thousands of dollars in a “free government grant,” don’t believe it – especially when the caller asks for your banking information.

A grant phone scam may currently be targeting the 608 area code, and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is asking residents to be on the lookout for these fraudulent calls.

Grant scams, whether unsolicited phone calls or through classified ads claiming to offer free money (and providing a toll-free number to call), typically begin with:

- A claim that your application for a grant is guaranteed to be accepted and that you will never have to pay back the money.
- A backstory about receiving the grant for paying taxes on time, having a clean criminal record and voting regularly. Other ploys include grants to pay for education costs, home repairs, business expenses or unpaid bills.
- A request for checking account information in order to establish a “direct deposit” of the grant funds or to cover a one-time “processing fee.” In actuality, the scammer is looking to drain your account.
- A phony reference number for the grant application.

Many standard phone scam tips apply for grant scam attempts:

- Never give out personal or banking information on an unsolicited call.
- Scammers can “spoof” their call information, making your caller ID display read however they wish. Never trust the phone number or company name that displays on the caller ID if you think it may be a scam call.
- To add legitimacy to the ploy, a crook may have some basic information about you on hand when they call, such as your name, address and age. Remember that this is publicly accessible information.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <http://datecp.wisconsin.gov>, send an e-mail to datecp@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Information Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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